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Little Gervaise

and other Stories

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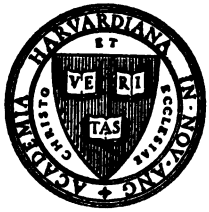

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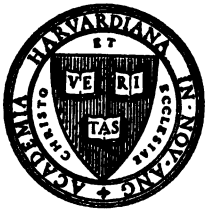

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FROM

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"Gervaise shared the chocolates and the sous . . . with the little clown."

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LITTLE GERVAISE

BY

JOHN STRANGE WINTER

AND

OTHER STORIES

BY

FRANCES E. CROMPTON
OLIVE MOLESWORTH
AND
E. M. GREEN

WITH TWENTY-ONE ILLUSTRATIONS

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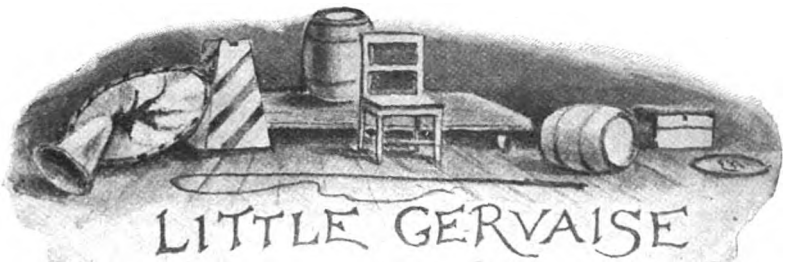

LITTLE GERVAISE

BY JOHN STRANGE WINTER

SHE was called Gervaise Lecourt, and, as her name tells you, she was French. She was young, pitifully young, slight of form, transparently fair of skin, with blue eyes, and golden hair. Eleven years had gone over her sunny head, but in size she was not larger than a child of seven. Kith and kin she had none—to her knowledge. Rumor in the circus which made her world said that she had been sold by her parents for thirty francs; sometimes rumor put it that she had been stolen from her parents without any consideration of money. If that was so, they had very little chance of tracing her, for she was described in the bills as "the little English Equestrienne," under the name of Maude Carrington. Ever since she could remember she had been Maude Carrington in the bills which announced the details of the performance given in the circus, and equally long she had been Gervaise in private life. Most of the people by whom she was surrounded had no knowledge of her name of Lecourt; they called her "la petite," or "petite Gervaise," and sometimes "the little Englishwoman"; but Gervaise knew no word of English, excepting her fancy name of Maude.

How shall I describe to you what a life it was? Hard, yes; cruel, no; for, as a rule, French people are not cruel to children. A poor life, a wretched life, squalid and desolate in

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many ways, her ambitions centred wholly and solely on her feats with Etoile, the beautiful thoroughbred mare which was her partner in the show. Her only playfellow was the clown's little boy, and from him she accepted scratches, kicks, and bites as philosophically as little French children usually bear such attentions from the juvenile lords of creation. There were times when Paul was pleasant and agreeable, generally when Gervaise had received a few pence in the ring, or when some extra tempting box of chocolates had been thrown to her from some admirer in the better parts of the house. Gervaise shared the chocolates and the sous when she possessed them, with the little clown, taking it quite as a matter of course when Paul had money and they happened to be in a town where a fair was going on, that he should spend it upon the roundabouts, and never dream of sharing so much as a farthing with his little sister of the ring. He was learning to be a clown like his father, was Paul, and his taunting remarks as to the future often cut Gervaise to the very depth of her desolate little heart.

"A clown has the best of it," he would say. "See my father—he is in the ring all the time, everybody watches him, everybody laughs when he comes. As for Miss ——" speaking of the English lady rider who was the great attraction of the circus—"she has finished every night in a quarter of an hour! Pooh! What good is there in that?"

"It is not easy," said Gervaise, indignantly, one day, when he had jeered at her until her powers of endurance were exhausted.

"Easy! No, *ma foi;* but who knows how difficult it is? Not one of those idiots who sit staring and sucking oranges. But the clown pleases them all—the oldest and the youngest, the clever and the stupid, all can understand and enjoy the clown. As for you, you miserable girl thing, you tremble

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every night when your time is coming, and you shake with emotion when it is over. Bah! What sort of a part is that for one round of applause!"

"I get many rounds of applause," cried Gervaise, indignantly, "yes, many rounds of applause, and sometimes chocolates, and sometimes sous; when does a clown ever get anything?"

"He gets all the laughter," repeated Paul, sturdily, "that is the best of it. The game is not worth the candle for the equestrians."

For a moment Gervaise stood looking at him, her eyes blazing with indignation. Would he never give her credit for what she did; would he never put her upon a level with himself; would he always despise her, wound her, jeer at her; would it always be the same? Would she go on year after year until she was a grown woman, and would Paul, whom she loved so much, whom she looked up to and almost reverenced, would he never understand that there was something in her that even a clown could not touch? But no; it could not go on forever; no, no, not even though his father was very powerful, one of the most celebrated clowns in France, for a day would come——"Thou wilt have to go for a soldier," she burst out indignantly.

Whereupon Paul promptly pinched her, nipping her so hard that she shrieked out in dismay and whimpered a little, and cringed to him as girls do. He towered above her.

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"The clown is greater than the rider," he said, threateningly.

"No, no, Paul."

"Yes, thou shalt say it—the clown is first."

And, by the aid of another judicious nip, she gave in and cried, "Yes, yes, the clown is first above all."

A few evenings later the circus was all bright with light; the house was full; a sea of faces surrounded the ring, the ladies all wore their best skirts, the men their smartest clothes, the horses had been given an extra grooming, and the heart of Gervaise was sick with apprehension. For it was a great night with the Grand Cirque de Vendôme. In truth the proprietor had been sufficiently fortunate to induce the great lady of the neighborhood in which they then were to bespeak the evening, and Madame la Duchesse had just arrived with a large party, and was occupying the place of honor.

Now, Madame la Duchesse was thoroughly English in her tastes and sympathies. Although purely French by birth, she had been brought up very much in the English manner, and had received an almost English education. From her cradle English nurses had tended her, and later on English governesses had trained her for the great world, in which she played a very important part. She believed, with many other enlightened French people, that there is a reason for the dominance of the English race, that there is a reason why English people spread all over the globe and make themseves at home in every corner thereof; she believed that, as a race, the French are wanting in many of the best qualities which distinguish the English nation, but that when once France has grasped the secret of English greatness France will become the greatest nation in the world. If only Madame la Duchesse had had a large family of children whom she could have trained according to her ideas, she would have been the happiest woman in

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France; but, alas, Madame la Duchesse had never a chick nor a child. At the great Château several miles away there were no little feet to echo along the spacious corridors, there were no ringing children's voices to make music in the great courtyards. Alas, no; all was still, calm, dignified and desolate, and Madame la Duchesse's theories remained theories, for she had no material upon which to experiment, no ground to work upon for the regeneration of France.

She looked happy enough as she sat there wrapped in her velvet and furs with diamonds gleaming at her throat, and her interested eyes roaming over everything. "I am waiting most anxiously of all for the little English equestrienne," she said to a gentleman seated beside her; "they say she is too sweet, too utterly charming. Ah! here she comes."

She watched Gervaise on her chestnut thoroughbred canter round the ring, and as she passed immediately in front of them she caught her breath sharply.

"*Mon Dieu!* What a baby!" she exclaimed.

The gentleman turned his eyes upon her.

"Ah, madame," he said, "these children look small by reason of their surroundings, and they begin early."

"She cannot be more than five years old," said the Duchesse.

"I am not a judge of little girls' ages," replied the man; "I know better, madame, twenty years after."

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She did not answer him, but she watched the little figure with its streaming golden hair and great blue pathetic eyes, dark at that moment with anxiety, as the horse careered round and round.

Then she began her tricks. The child was very nervous. The occasion was a great one; the result of failure would be the jeers of Paul, the boy clown; Paul, her companion; Paul, her admiration; Paul, her tormentor and joy. The first part of her performance brought nothing but satisfaction. Again and again she was recalled and applauded to the very echo.

"I should like her to come and speak to me," said Madame la Duchesse.

One of the gentlemen of her party called the proprietor of the circus.

"Not until afterwards, if Madame la Duchesse will permit. The excitement of being noticed by so great a lady might unnerve the child. If madame would permit that the little Maude should finish her performance, she shall then wait upon Madame la Duchesse at the close of it."

So madame smiled her consent, and turned again to witness the performance of the little English equestrienne.

It was just at the close of the performance that Gervaise slipped and fell, with what looked like an ugly accident. There was an ugly bruise at the side of her face, but she was on her feet in a moment, conscious that Madame la Duchesse was watching her, that all the world—or that part of it where they then were—was looking on.

"But you hurt yourself, my child," cried the great lady, when Gervaise was brought near her.

"Nay, madame, but a little," she answered.

"But that great bruise upon your cheek; surely that hurts you?"

"It is nothing, madame," the child replied bravely, though

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"'But you hurt yourself, my child,' cried the great lady."

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she had to wink hard to keep the tears out of her eyes as she spoke.

"Then," said the Duchesse, "I will kiss the other cheek, because you are so brave, my little one."

She was accustomed to kisses, this child of the circus, but not to the kisses of so great and wonderful a lady. A subtle kind of intoxication overspread her; the scent of rich fur, the voluptuous touch of costly velvet, the strong aroma which pervades the garments, the laces, the hair, the skin, of a woman of the great world, all tended to intoxicate her with delight.

"You are English, my little one?" said the Duchesse, speaking in that tongue.

But the child looked at her with her wondering blue eyes, and plainly knew not a word of what she meant.

"You are French?" said the Duchesse, asking the question differently.

"Yes, madame, I am French."

"And your name?"

"My own name is Gervaise."

Gervaise; it was the Duchesse's favorite name.

"Little Gervaise, with the golden curls," she said, "where are your father and mother?"

"I have no father and mother," said Gervaise.

"No father and mother? Then to whom do you belong?"

"I do not know. I suppose to Monsieur le Propriétaire."

"With whom do you live?"

"I live with Madame Maryx," Gervaise replied. "She is the wife of Monsieur Maryx, the clown."

"Ah! She is kind to you?"

"Oh, yes, madame."

"Do you find this very hard work?"

"I am sometimes tired," said the child simply.

"You love the horse you ride?"

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The blue eyes looked steadfastly into those of the great lady. "I am afraid of her," she said at last; and the words seemed to be drawn out almost unwillingly.

"You are afraid of her—always?"

"Yes—always."

Then the Duchesse kissed her again, pressed some money into her hand, gave her also some bonbons, and bade her good-night.

That evening's performance was the turning-point in Gervaise's young life, for Madame la Duchesse proposed to the proprietor of the circus that she should adopt her.

"The child is delicate," she said to him, during the interview which took place for the purpose of arranging the matter; "I have taken a fancy to her. You had better let me take charge of her."

"But—if Madame la Duchesse will permit me to say so—the child is a great attraction; she brings money to the theatre; she has the makings of a great horsewoman in her."

"No, her nerve is not strong enough—the child is nerve-broke," said the Duchesse, speaking carelessly and in the tone of one who knows what she is speaking of. "She will never be any good to you—she is afraid of her horse."

"No, no—I can assure Madame la Duchesse——"

"It is of no use assuring me, monsieur; the child will never be any good. Best make her over to me and I will bring her up in a different way."

"But Madame la Duchesse, she is worth money to me."

"Then I will give you money for her. What is your price?"

The price when he named it was heavy, but it ended in Gervaise being transferred from the circus ring to the great Château. At first she was delighted. The novelty of her surroundings, the richness of her new clothes, the charm of

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many possessions, the kindly voices around her, the petting she received, all combined to make her feel that she had entered upon a new world. Then there came a governess and lessons. Then madame and her guests all left the Château for a time, and there came long days of terrible dullness, days when, in the midst of splendor, poor little Gervaise pined for the homely pleasure of her life with Madame Maryx, for the simple *pot-au-feu*, the homely *croûtons*, for the interests which had been hers during her whole life, and most of all for her playfellow the boy-clown.

She could read enough to amuse herself, and often after she and Paul had been poring over some thrilling romance she had dreamed fairy visions of life in a great château, of a life in which gold and silver plate, pearls and diamonds, laces and velvet and fur filled the larger part. Well, she had, by a miracle, been transplanted into such a life, and she was choked by it. She was always wrong in something. They were not unkind to her, and yet she felt that nobody loved her, that nobody wanted her, that she was a tax and a trouble and an annoyance to everybody by whom she was surrounded. She never realized, in her excitable child's mind, that to all the household of Madame la Duchesse she was but a part of the day's work. She felt strange, uncomfortable and unhappy; and at last when pent-up nature could bear no more, she set off through the dark night to find her way back to the Grand Cirque de Vendôme.

The time was mid-winter, the weather unusually severe; the way was dark and dreary, and the child was wearing clothes suitable for a well-warmed house. Time and again it seemed as if she must drop by the way-side, as if her numbed feet could not take another step; and yet she struggled on doggedly, determinedly, and painfully.

And at last she turned in at the narrow street which led

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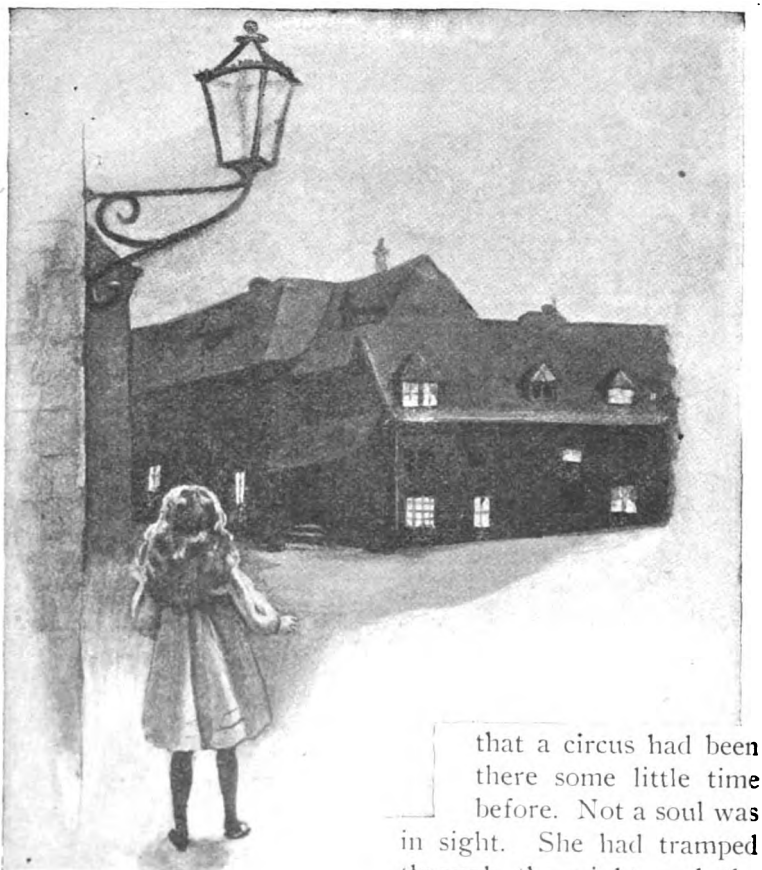
to the market place where the circus had stood. Alas, alas! the feeble gaslights overhead flickered fitfully down upon an empty space. Only the faint traces of a sawdust ring showed



that a circus had been there some little time before. Not a soul was in sight. She had tramped through the night and the rain, against the wind and the sleet, to find—nothing; to find a mere trace which told nothing but that she was left alone.

How am I to tell the rest? How she sank sobbing, face

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downwards in the sodden dust which had once been the scene of her triumph; how she sobbed as if her child's heart would break; how through her aching brain there came again and again the one thought that they were gone, they had left her behind, she would never see Paul again!

And as she lay there, a carriage dashed up, its occupants led by instinct to the spot to which the child had fled.

"Naughty child!" cried the voice of her governess, in tones of anger and relief. "What possessed you? One would think you had been ill-used, beaten. Naughty child! What will Madame la Duchesse say?"

"Nay, mademoiselle," said the voice of Jacques, the valet de chambre, "nay, mademoiselle, do not distress yourself. It was but a whim of Madame la Duchesse. Let us get her to the inn as soon as possible. It is no use distressing yourself. It is always the same with these vermin!"

It was then, with that word vermin ringing in her ears, that Gervaise lifted herself up from the ground and turned to go back again to her splendid prison.

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MACDA

BY FRANCES E CROMPTON

WE began by liking her pretty well on the first day. We said she wasn't quite as nice as we had thought she was on the second; we decided that we didn't care for her on the third; and we perfectly hated her at the end of the week.

Of course, it wasn't *our* faults. We did not particularly want her to come, but since she had to, we had made up our minds to be nice to her, if she was nice to us. But she wasn't; she turned out horrid—at least, we said so; and we began to turn out horrid too.

We were getting too old for a real nurse, you see, and yet were not old enough to do everything for ourselves, and so when our last nurse went away to be married, we were to have a sewing-maid to look after us.

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We heard Mother telling some callers that she had found a very nice one, a kind of upper maid, a German, though she had lived a long time with an English family in Dresden. She had come with them to England, but was obliged to find another place, as misfortune had caused them to break up their home. We were quite excited about her after hearing this, but it did damp us a good deal when she came for Mother to see her. It was after our bed-time, but the next morning we heard our own nurse and Ellen, the housemaid, laughing over the queer plain clothes of the new German maid.

Nurse didn't actually *say* anything against her when we asked what she was like; she only laughed a little in a way that made us somehow understand that she could have laughed a good deal more. Nurse was very pretty and very smart herself, and as long as she could have plenty of time for dressing herself indoors, and for talking to people out of doors, she let us have almost everything our own way, so of course we were very sorry about her going. (We don't think Mother was as sorry as we were, but she didn't say it.)

So nurse made us feel subduedish, as Winnie calls it, about the new maid, and we were very low-spirited indeed by the time she left us, which was at the end of that week. However, on Sunday morning things did not seem quite so bad, and we began to look forward again, and feeling very good all day, we decided to be nice to the new maid, in spite of Nurse's laughing. That is, Maud said (to allow us a kind of loophole of escape in case of needing one) if she turned out nice to us. Which, Maud said afterwards, was just what she didn't.

She came the next day. We had only a morning governess, so the old nursery was to be turned into a kind of playroom, where the new maid could also sit and sew. She came in time to give us our tea there, and we rather liked her.

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Her name was Magda, and she came from Germany, out of the Thüringian Forest. She had very fair hair, and flaxen hair that she said they had in Saxony, but a pale plain face that generally looked rather sad unless she was talking to you. I think when she sat sewing she used to be thinking about her home. She was so very different from Nurse that we could not help noticing it; Nurse had such a neat waist, and such a laughing face, and caps and aprons that would have looked pretty on anybody, but on her looked prettier than ever.

Magda had a square kind of short figure, and her clothes were very clean, very plain, and very queer all over. She told us after a day or two that she could see she was not dressed like other maids, and she would make some prettier white aprons, but it had never been the way where she came from to spend much money on one's own dress, and she always sent most of her money home to the woodman's lodge in the forest, where there were so many little brothers and sisters to help.

We did admit to each other that it was very good and unselfish of her, but it was only admitting (which is quite different from admiring), because, by that time we had resolved that we wouldn't like her.

There were a good many things against her. I am afraid we had got really into a disobedient sort of way when Father and Mother were not there, because Nurse had let us please ourselves so much.

At any rate, it seemed as if everything Magda told us to do was a trouble, and there were so many things to tell about, and we set them all down to horridness in her. It was like this, all day long:

"Miss Maud, you have left your shoes lying on the floor again. That is two times this morning I have told you." (For

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she spoke English very well, only sometimes it sounded a little stiff and odd.)

"Well, I'll do them presently."

"Miss Mary, please to return my scissors to this place.

"In a minute, Magda."

"Miss Winnie, you know you are not permitted to go down to the drawing-room in your pinafore."

"I've been many a time. Nurse didn't mind if Mother didn't see it."

"That is no matter to me, Miss Winnie. I do mind. And, Miss Maud, shall I tell you again to put your shoes away?"

Another thing against her was that Miss Hayward only came for morning lessons, so Magda was to teach us to sew nicely. She was the most beautiful worker in the world, I do believe, better even than Mother, and the way she could mend and mark the house linen was lovely to see. I used to feel that I actually longed to be taught to sew like her, because of being fond of needlework and dolls; but I was ashamed to say so, because the others hated sewing, Maud and Winnie with being rather tomboys, and Nella with being idle. So the sewing-hour in the afternoon came to be the horridest in the day, and as Magda had to teach us, we grew into feeling as if it were somehow all her fault.

At first, while we sewed, and at tea, she would tell us about her home in the Thüringian Forest; it sounded so pretty, as she told it, about the miles and miles of green forest in the spring-time, and the open parts about the villages, where there would be vineyards on the hills, and cherry orchards all round the villages, and the houses would be built mostly of wood, and painted different colors, with very steep red roofs, and you would meet timber-wagons drawn by oxen coming through the beech-woods, and perhaps there would be a stone

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"We scrambled through a gap."

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cross by the wayside. She used to look as if she were smiling and crying together when she talked about "the dear Thüringen-land!"

But it was only at first that she told us about her home; she must have seen after a week or two that we didn't want to be friendly with her, and she grew into being generally silent, and only speaking when she had to tell us to do something. It was our own doing, and yet it vexed us, and we excused ourselves again by saying it was all her horridness.

We weren't happy all the time, and we didn't feel really satisfied with ourselves, though we tried hard to feel it. I think the others felt ashamed at times when we were being so horrid (for the horridness was all in us, as anybody would see) and so troublesome, and she only went on doing her work patiently; it seemed somehow all the meaner of us because she never complained to Mother, and I expect the others often felt really ashamed. I know I did.

Nella's birthday comes in September, and ever since we were old enough to run about, the treat has been for us to go blackberrying on that day to Withered Wood. It was rather a long way to walk, so we were always allowed to have Mother's pony carriage, and the pony was put up at the nearest farm while we were blackberrying.

It was Nella's birthday some weeks after Magda came to us, and we had been looking forward to the holiday we always had for ever so long, and we knew that Cook had even made the cake for the picnic tea—when, the day before, Mother came into the play-room where we were sitting sewing with Magda. She said—

"I am so sorry to disappoint you, children, but Thomas has just come to tell me that Linnet has fallen very lame."

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Linnet was Mother's pony, so anyone can imagine how we cried—

"Oh, *Mother!*" "Oh, Mother, how horrid!" "Oh, Mother, will it stop us going to-morrow?"

"I am afraid it will," Mother said; "indeed, there is no doubt about it. Linnet will not be fit to go out again this week. So I have come to say that I hope you will make up your minds to bear the disappointment as bravely as possible. You shall have the holiday, of course, and the birthday cake, and if you must have the blackberrying too, you must ask Magda to take you a walk and see what you can find in the fields nearer home."

"Surely I will," said Magda, as willingly as if we were always as nice as possible to *her,* and although she was sometimes not able to walk far through being a little lame.

We didn't answer; I am afraid we looked rather sulky, for Mother said again: "I hope to see you all bearing the disappointment well," and as we still never answered, she looked at us rather gravely, and then went out.

"It's a shame! It's a shame!" cried Nella.

"Who wants to go into the old fields for a walk?" said Maud scornfully.

"I'd rather stay at home altogether," I said.

Magda told us quietly to go on with our work, and to think over what Mother had said, so we had to grumble to each other in whispers.

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"But I've been thinking, Mother," said Maud, in the evening, "that we can go to the wood all the same. We are getting old enough to walk there, I am sure, as the boys do in the holidays."

"Much too far, Maud," said Mother decidedly; "too far for you, not to speak of the younger ones. And it would not be kind to Magda to ask her to take you."

She never supposed that we should think of it again, and meant that to forbid it, but she had not actually *said* it, as Maud pointed out that night when we had gone to bed.

"And I propose," she said, "that to-morrow we go out with Magda as if we were going just for a walk, and then slip away from her, and run until we get into the road, and go on to Withered Wood by ourselves. If it weren't for her, we could walk there, so let us go by ourselves."

"We shall get into a scrape," I said, rather doubtfully, though we all liked the idea.

"We shan't mind that for once, if we have been the walk," said Maud, tossing her head. "Besides, if we don't stay long in the wood, we can get back before Magda has gone home. Even if she does know, she won't tell Mother: she never does."

So we all agreed, and went to sleep on it.

Nella's birthday came, a beautiful day; the sort of morning in September when there are a great many cobwebs all over the bushes, and the sun is a long time in coming out, and then comes out as if he thought it were summer yet, and the air is so still that you can hear chestnuts and acorns dropping on the dead leaves. It made us think of the lovely blackberrying day we ought to have had in Withered Wood.

"But we'll go all the same," said Maud.

"Well, we did it. We had to do without the picnic tea, of course, and we felt rather mean and uncomfortable all the time, but when Magda asked if she should take us out after

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dinner, we said that she might if she liked. It would have served us right if she had said that she didn't like, and we might just stay at home, but she didn't; she only helped us to get dressed as patiently as ever, and we took our baskets and set out, Mother telling us to be in for the birthday tea in the play-room at half-past five. I may as well say at once that we weren't, but *that* wasn't part of our plan; we quite meant to be.

We set out with Magda, and hurried her on a good deal farther than she really wanted to go. We wouldn't be satisfied with the fields near home, but went on and on until she began to look very tired. She had never been able to walk much since she had broken her ankle with falling down one winter day. She said it was this that made her come out to service so far from home; but for that, she would have stayed near home, even to do harder work.

So at last she said she must sit down and rest a little on a bank, while we gathered the blackberries along the hedge.

It was just what we wanted. When we had got to the end of the hedge, we called to Magda that we were going to the other side of it, and we scrambled through a gap, and then stooped down and ran as fast as we could go across two or three fields, until we came out through a gate into the road.

"We needn't run," said Maud; "she won't begin to wonder where we are until she has rested. Only we must walk pretty quickly, you know, to get there and back before half-past five. It's all Magda's fault for walking so slowly."

"It feels quite like having adventures," said Winnie, with great enjoyment.

However, we didn't have any adventures at all on our way to the wood: indeed, just after the first, it seemed not as much fun as we had expected it to be: we walked very fast but without talking or laughing much now, and the road

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proved to be ever so much longer than we had imagined it would. Another thing was that the sun had gone in, after one of those mornings "too bright to last," as people say, and the afternoon had turned out very cloudy and dull.

Withered Wood is a grand place really: it is not a regular wood from one side to the other, because a good deal of it has been burnt several times by gipsy fires (which is how it got its name); now it has only trees in clumps here and there, and the rest of the ground is all up and down, with gravelly banks and rabbit-warrens, and great bushes of gorse, and such perfect mountains of brambles that there could not be a better place in the world for blackberries.

We cheered up when we got there, at the sight of the laden bushes, and began to pick as quickly as we could. We knew we should not have much time to stay if we were to be at home at half-past five, but it had taken us much longer to get there than we had expected, and when we did get there, the bushes were really so tempting that we kept staying "just another five minutes," and "just another two or three," and "just till the baskets were filled," and so we were picking away, and calling to each other out of the bushes, when Maud suddenly said, in a very altered sort of voice, "I do believe it's getting late. I heard a church clock striking a good way off, and I wasn't counting, but I feel a little afraid that it struck more than four times." It seemed to startle us all, and we jumped down the banks of the wood, and ran out into the open road.

"Maud, it's raining," I said.

"Well, I did think it was just beginning, a little while ago," she said, very unwillingly. "Perhaps it will go off soon."

"Oh, but it is coming on quite fast," cried Nella, and it

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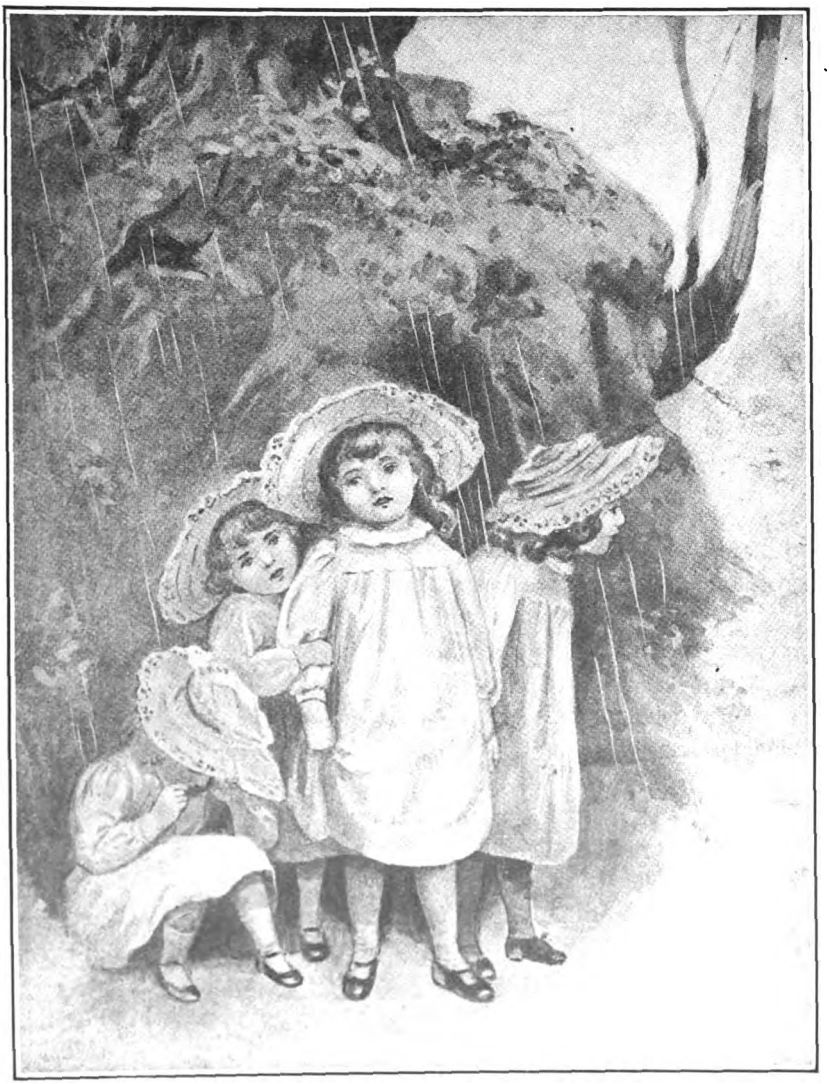

"We crouched down under one of the banks, . . . and waited."

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did not need her to tell us so, for it was pattering round us very fast now.

We began to be a little anxious. We had only print frocks on, and it did seem such a long way home.

"I think we had better shelter a little under one of these banks," said Maud. "I daresay it will stop soon, and we must make up the time by running."

So we crouched down under one of the banks, where the roots of an oak-tree stuck out and made a little ledge over us, and we waited.

We went on waiting too, for it grew worse instead of better. We waited until there could be no hope of making up the lost time by running, and we made up our minds to be what Maud called "perhaps a bit late," but in our hearts we were afraid that it would be a good deal more than "a bit."

The rain came down with dreadful steadiness, and the sky was grey all round: we looked and looked for any sign of an opening, but there was not so much as a streak anywhere.

And the ground began to be quite wet all round, the rain was trickling down our bank, and our frocks were getting all draggled with wet gravel.

Nella and Winnie made things worse by squabbling, and laying all the blame on Maud and me, and we couldn't say we didn't deserve it, being the eldest, and having led them into mischief. Suddenly Nella stopped in the middle of a quarrel with Winnie about taking up too much of the shelter, to say: "I can hear somebody coming up the wood."

"It's only someone passing along the road," Maud said, "If a cart would go past, we'd run and ask for a ride."

"But it isn't on the road—it's coming this way," said Winnie, in a very alarmed manner.

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"It's gipsies," said Nella, and burst into a roar of crying.

"Hush," whispered Maud, but it was too late.

The footsteps came round our bank, and some one stood there, and looked at us.

It was Magda. I do believe it was real joy that made Winnie and Nella roar so wildly, and I don't think Maud and I were ever gladder to see anyone in our lives, so wet and anxious, and wretched as we were by this time.

"Oh, Magda, how *did* you find us?" we cried.

"I saw you all across the fields when you were running away. I should have come sooner, but it has taken me so long to follow, because I had to rest, you know. Ah, the poor silly little ones."

And that was all she said—our kind, dear Magda.

She hadn't gone home and told of our naughtiness, and we *did* deserve it. Oh! how we did! She had only come limping on after us, resting and toiling on again until she found us.

"Oh, Magda, do get us home, do get us home," sobbed Nella and Winnie.

Magda looked at us, and all about her, as anxiously as if it were all her fault.

"I think we must try to get home," she said. "You could not be more wet walking through the rain. It grows no better, and it gets later, and there is no house near where we could borrow some cloaks. They will think at home

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that we are only sheltering in the village. I think we shall have to go. I can carry you a little now and then, Miss Nella."

For Nella was roaring harder than ever, and declaring that she could never walk home, until Maud had to be cross with her, and tell her that she must walk or stay behind by herself.

So we set out, Nella being carried, because of being the youngest, and Winnie wrapped in Magda's jacket (and nobody laughed at it that night) because she has croup. Oh, what a long, wet, miserable walk it was! How we splashed along in our soppy boots and how the rain dripped off our hats, and ran down our faces, and soaked into our frocks.

How Maud and I hated ourselves, as Magda limped along, with Winnie by her side wrapped in the jacket, and Nella in her arms for the greater part of the way, and with Maud and me placed behind her, so that she could keep the rain off us.

And all the time she never said a word of complaint—never anything but: "Poor silly little ones."

Well, it didn't seem any punishment at all to be sent straight to bed when we did get home: indeed, it was done as a punishment, because we *had* to be punished, but we should have had to go to bed anyway, so tired, and wet, and miserable as we were. But after we got there, I began to have a crying fit, and could not stop it, and so we lay awake, and I cried and cried, and the others lay awake, and thought things over.

And then in the middle of it, we heard whispering outside the door.

One voice sounded like Mother's, and it said, "No, no, Magda, it is most good of you, but they don't deserve it."

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And the other voice said, "But do permit me. Perhaps *now*—" And the whispering went lower and lower, and stopped. And then the door opened, and someone limped across the room, and sat down on the edge of my bed, and leaned over me, and cuddled me, and wiped my eyes so comfortingly. And the someone was calling me all sorts of funny little German pet names, but the squareness of the person who was drawing my head against hers, and the shape of the cap against the

light of the door-way, told me without the German, that it was Magda.

"Oh, Magda," I sobbed, all sick with crying, "I heard Mother herself say we didn't deserve you to love us, and we know we don't."

And Magda didn't tell us not to mind the naughtiness, as Nurse used to do when she comforted us: she thought naughtiness was too grave for that.

But she said instead, "Ah, little heart, what should we all

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do if we had to wait until we deserved it before the Lord God would love us? Ah, no, let us remember that, and forgive and forget the rest."

"We shall love you now, anyway," said Maud, sitting up in bed, and speaking in a very high loud voice that showed she was just at crying-point too.

"Why, then," said Magda, limping round to each bed to give us all kisses, "we are all going to be happy, and I shall not mind anything any more."

And I am sure we have not yet got over being ashamed that that she should have been "minding" all the time.

The only comfort we had was to say in our hearts that she should never have to mind in the same way again—never again.

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THERE is nothing in the whole world so difficult as to know what big people like for presents," thought Charlie, as he turned over and over again with a puzzled sigh some pennies, sixpences, and threepenny bits—which together formed the sum of two shillings—as if that would help him out of his difficulty.

Charlie lived with an aunt and three cousins, Muriel, Cecil, and Poppy, and Christmas was getting very near.

At the same season the year before, Poppy had seemed quite a little girl, and it had been easy enough then to choose her a present. But twelve months bring changes, and she was now so much taller, and her skirts had become so much longer, that there was nothing for it but to treat even her as "grown up" and supply a suitable offering in consequence.

Just then a penny fell from Charlie's fingers and dropped on to the floor, and down he went in search of it. After a hunt of several minutes he found it had rolled in among some marbles left lying in a corner of the nursery. Among these were four which Charlie greatly prized, as they were much prettier than his common brown stone ones. You could almost see through them, and they were of a shiny golden-brown color. As the little boy picked them up, thinking it was careless to have left them lying like that on the floor, he thought what

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nice presents they would make for his aunt and cousins if only, grown-up people could care for things of the kind.

That afternoon he went out for a walk with his cousin Muriel. Charlie was very fond of her, she was so easy to talk to, and never made fun of him as the others sometimes did. He was wondering whether he should ask her to tell him of something she would really like for Christmas, when she stopped at a shop window.

"What lovely agate hat-pins!" she exclaimed. "I should so like one of them and so would the others. Let us go in and ask their price, Charlie."

"Oh, please don't," cried her little cousin, with sparkling eyes; "please stay here, dear Muriel, and let me go in and ask about them."

Muriel promised to do what he wanted, and Charlie ran into the shop, where he was met both by a surprise and a disappointment. The surprise was caused by seeing, when he held it in his hand, that the top of the hat-pin—the "agate," as Muriel had called it—was exactly the same kind of stone as his pretty marbles at home, and the disappointment was owing to the fact that each pin cost five shillings.

But all of a sudden an idea came to him.

"I've got four shiny stones like these," he said eagerly to the shop-woman. "Could you put a long pin in each if I sent them here? And *could* you do them for sixpence each?"

The answer he got sent him back to Muriel with such a beaming face that it was all she could do not to ask him what he was so pleased about. Perhaps she just guessed enough of what had passed for her to think it best to say nothing.

They went home after that, as it was beginning to get dark, and Charlie could not go out again that day to the shop with his agates. However, when he got back he found that Nurse was on the point of starting off on a shopping expedition

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of her own, and she promised to take them for him, if he gave them to her quickly.

Up rushed Charlie to the nursery, which by now was almost dark except for the light of the fire, and he fumbled in a drawer for some minutes before he could feel the four little polished balls he was in search of. He then wrapped them hastily in a scrap of paper, and handed them to Nurse, who had come upstairs to say that she could wait no longer.

Two days later, coming home from his afternoon walk, Charlie found a long narrow box waiting for him. He knew it held his presents, and ran upstairs in frantic haste to examine them. But when he had opened the parcel he gave a cry of dismay! What had happened to his beautiful agates? For there indeed lay four hat-pins, but topped by little ugly dull brown knobs, of the same shape and size, it is true, but far from having the same appearance as Charlie's transparent shining stones. He stood staring at them in bewilderment, heightened by a kind of feeling that he had seen them somewhere before! At last he thought he understood and burst into tears. "Oh, dear," he sobbed, "it's having pierced them with pins that must have taken all the shininess out of them! Oh, what shall I do?"

"Charlie, dear, whatever's the matter?" said Muriel's voice, and glancing up, Charlie saw her standing in the doorway, looking so sorry and kind that he fell into her arms and told her what a dreadful thing had happened.

When Muriel had heard all, she too was quite puzzled.

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The only way she could explain it was by thinking that some mistake had been made at the shop, and as she was just going out she put the pins back into their box, and carried them off with her, saying that she felt quite certain of getting things put right in the end.

But no! When she told her story the shopwoman seemed as perplexed as anyone. Those were the stones the young gentleman sent—of that she was sure, and thinking poor Charlie had been mistaken in supposing them to be agates, she had had them mounted as he had ordered.

When Muriel got home, quite sad at having no good news to tell, the front door was flung open before she had quite reached it by Charlie himself, his face shining with happiness in spite of traces of not long dried-up tears.

"Muriel," he cried, "do you know what's happened? It's so funny! I gave *common* marbles to Nurse by mistake! I've just found the agates—look at them! Oh, Muriel, will they change them again? But," his face falling, "perhaps they wouldn't do it *two* times for sixpence each?"

But Muriel said she felt sure all could be easily arranged, and she must have been right. For it was a bill of only two shillings which Charlie paid a day or two later, with a well-satisfied face, and his aunt and her three daughters went to church on Christmas Day with their hats securely fastened to their hair by agate-topped pins, at which one small member of the congregation glanced from time to time with the utmost joy and pride.

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THERE is no need to describe the Big Professor, for everyone knows him. His picture with its keen, clever look, hangs in the photographer's window, and tells you what his outer man is like; his books are bought everywhere, and sometimes read, so you can find from them what his thoughts and opinions are.

But the Little Professor——?

That is a different thing.

His portrait stands only on the study table: and when he takes pen in hand and writes a letter, none is found learned enough to decipher the writing, and the housemaid consigns it to the waste-paper basket.

So we may speak of the Little Professor without fear of telling the world what it knows already, which is always a foolish thing to do.

The Little Professor was perched on the garden gate waiting for the tram which would bring the Big Professor home. The perch was rather insecure, as his toes barely reached the bar on each side.

The Little Professor's soft silky hair fell on his shoulders.

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and his clear blue eyes saw many things that those about him never saw.

The heavy tram lumbered up the hill, and the Little Professor was on the other side of the gate in a moment, rushing towards the quiet man who had spoken to no one on his way from the college.

A spring and a shout, and then the two turned homewards.

The vicar's wife, turning in at her gate, felt the sudden rush of pity that women will feel for children who are motherless, but the Little Professor was perfectly happy.

Half an hour later, when he ought to have been in bed, he sat by his father at the dinner-table, describing the events of the day.

The Big Professor was a wise man, and he expressed no doubt when the Little Professor told him of the lions and tigers, and fairies that he had seen and talked with. He did not tell the child that he was not speaking the truth and send him away, for he knew that the Little Professor's blue eyes could see into a world that was closed to him.

Then Nurse carried the sleepy child to bed, and at breakfast his dreams suited conveniently any topic that was mentioned.

The little head with its yellow locks was in sight till the Big Professor was round the corner on his way to the college; then Nurse's voice called—

"Master Clifford, Master Clifford!"

"He's coming," said the boy, who generally spoke of himself in the third person.

The Big Professor was busy correcting the proofs of a book which would show the world how foolish it was to believe anything that could not be proved; and people said it would be one of the deepest books of the day.

But the Little Professor would have made you believe

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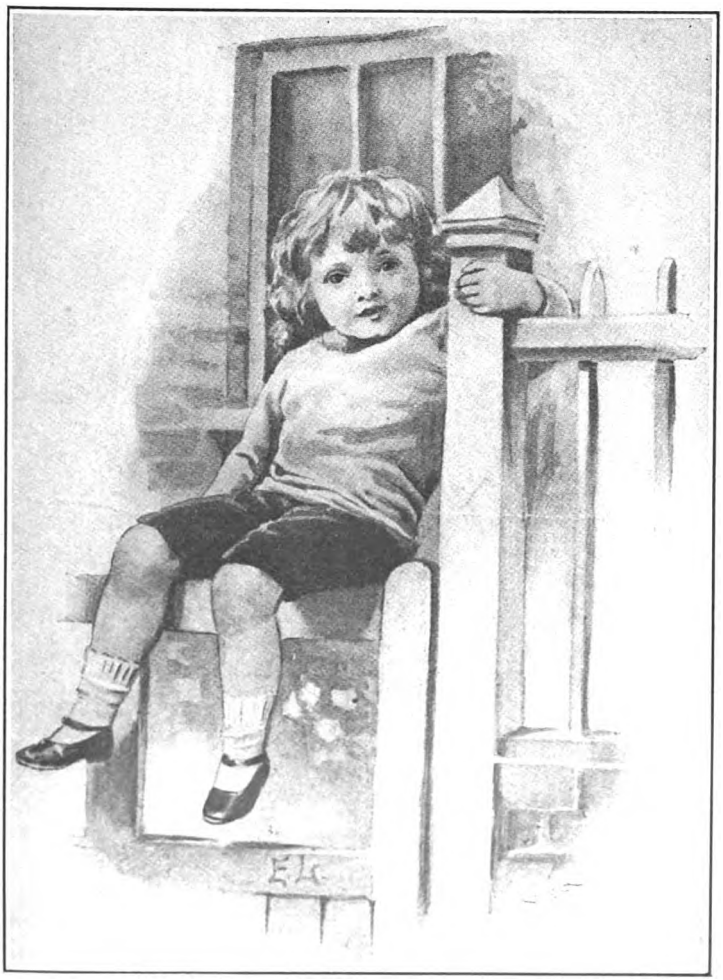

twenty impossible things in five minutes; and you would have learnt what the bee said, and heard the butterfly talk, and seen fairies dancing on the lawn.

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To the Big Professor the invisible was unreal, but to the Little Professor nothing was invisible; and his blue eyes had a look which his father's had lost long ago.

Every night and morning he lisped his prayer that "God would bless dear Father, and make him a good little boy;" while on the study table lay proofs of the chapter which was to show how futile a thing prayer was to alter the laws of the universe.

One evening when the Big Professor came home, the Little Professor was not at the gate.

"I am early," he said, but he entered the house hastily, and called—

"Little Professor!"

The Nurse came to him.

"Master Clifford is not well," she said, and he followed her into the darkened nursery, where the boy lay in his crib, hugging a toy lamb.

"He's tired," said the Little Professor, "and the lamb's tired. Kiss him, Father."

"I think, sir, he will be better in the morning," said the Nurse, remembering too well the night that the Little Professor became all that her master had in the world to care for.

But when the morning came the boy was really ill, and his Father went for the doctor instead of going to the college.

"Not much the matter, is there?" asked the Professor nervously, as the two stood in the study.

"I hope not," said the doctor gravely. "He must be kept quiet. I will come in again this afternoon."

The Professor stood in the same place after he had left, looking stupidly at a child's top which lay on some uncorrected proofs.

There came a tap at the door, and the announcement—

"Please, sir, Master Clifford wants you."

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"What is it, my darling?" said the Professor, as he bent over the crib.

"He's so tired," said the child wearily, "and something hurts his head."

"He will be better soon. Father will stay with him."

"Sing 'The Owl and the Pussy-cat,'" said the Little Professor, with a child's sudden fancy.

The Professor's vocal powers were small, and no one but his little son had ever heard his somewhat chromatic rendering of a few songs.

"Not now, dear," he said, feeling that the Nurse would not be an easy addition to the audience.

"Sing 'The Owl and the Pussycat,' please," repeated the Little Professor in the same tone, and the Big Professor sang with complete indifference to time:—

"The owl and the pussy-cat went to sea
In a beautiful pea-green boat.
They took with them honey, and plenty of money,
Wrapp'd up in a five-pound note;
The owl looked up to the moon above,
And sang to the light guitar:
'Oh, pussy, dear pussy, oh, pussy, my love,
What a beautiful pussy you are!'"

By the end of the chorus, the Professor was a tone and a half lower.

"Pussy said to the owl, 'You illigant fowl,
How charmingly sweet you sing!
Too long we have tarried, so let us get married;
But what shall we do for a ring?'
So they sailed away for a year and a day
Till they came where the Bong-tree grows,
And there in a wood a piggy-wig stood
With a ring at the end of his nose.

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"'Dear pig, are you willing to sell for a shilling
Your ring?' Said the pig, 'I will.'
So they took it away, and were married next day
By the turkey that lives on the hill.
They fed upon mince, and slices of quince,
Which they ate with a runcible spoon,
And hand-in-hand by the edge of the sand
They danced by the light of the moon."

The heavy eyes were closing. "Good-night, Father. Good night, Nursie," and the Little Professor was asleep.

The doctor came again, and he looked grave. Children so quickly fall ill.

For days and nights he lay weakly delirious, asking for things they could not understand, and crying pitifully.

"He wants a runcible spoon," he said one day, and every spoon in the house was offered him in vain till his Father fetched a beautifully chased silver spoon from the study.

"The poor Professor," said the doctor to the vicar's wife, whom he met in the garden.

"No better?" she said, thinking of the six healthy children she had just left, and of the tiny figure always waiting for his Father on the garden gate.

"No better," said the doctor. "A delicate child, too sensitive and imaginative for the struggle."

In the study the Father sat alone.

He had come down from the nursery where so often with failing voice he had had to sing "The Owl and the Pussy-cat," each time more hopelessly out of tune than the last.

Unanswered letters lay in disorder on the table, repeated requests from the printer for corrected proof.

He looked at them stupidly; then he took the top in his hand, and opened a drawer where there were colored marbles, and a toy whip, and a battered tin train.

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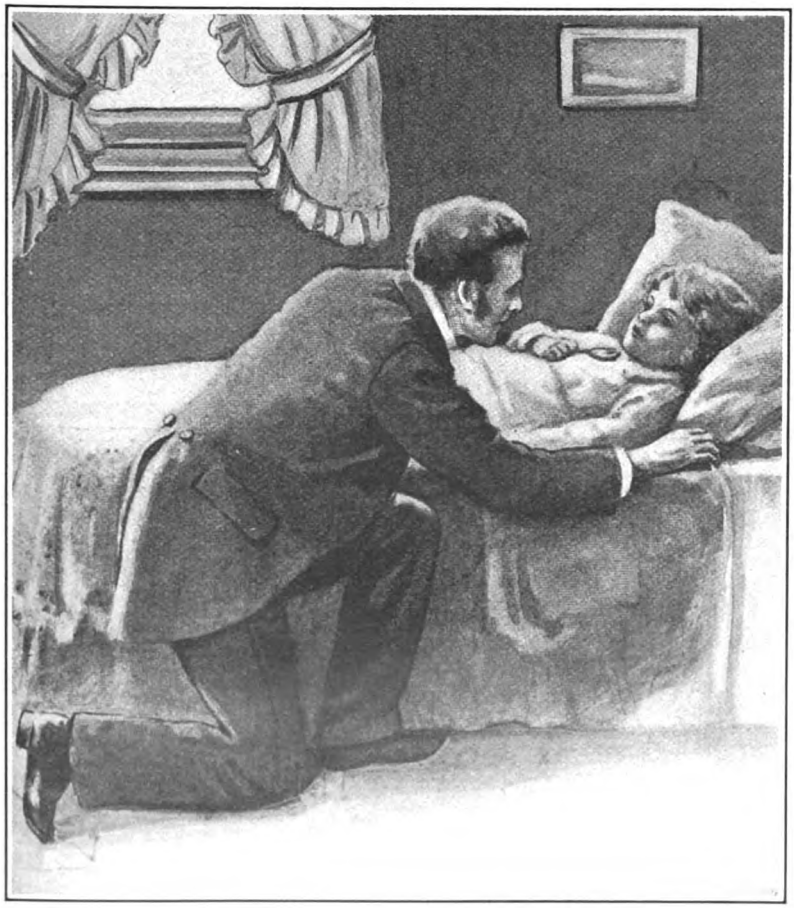
He touched these things gently, and then he rested his weary head on the desk before him.



A knock came at the door.

"Please, sir, Master Clifford is asking for you. Nurse has

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sent for the doctor," and the poor little housemaid, who had loved the child as they all loved him, found that her voice was failing.

The Little Professor lay still, grasping his "runcible spoon"; and he no longer babbled the nonsense he had talked for so long.

"Father."

"My Little Professor! My darling!"

"He's so tired."

"Go to sleep, dear. Father will stay here."

"He hasn't said his prayers."

"Never mind now, dear."

"God will mind," said the Little Professor, and in spite of all his learning the Big Professor knew that on these subjects the child's wisdom was deeper than his.

"But He won't mind if you say them 'stead," said the child gravely.

The doctor had come into the room quietly, and saw the change.

"You say them, and he will say 'Amen,'" said the Little Professor.

"Shall Nurse?" whispered the Big Professor, but the child answered, "No—you, Father."

The Big Professor knelt down by the crib.

"Out loud," said the boy. "God likes us to say them out loud."

What was he to say to satisfy the child?

"Out loud," came again from the crib, and the poor Father said—

"What shall I say, darling?"

"Oh, don't you know? 'Pray God, bless dear Father'—"

"Pray God, bless dear Father."

"'And make me a good little boy'—"

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"And make me a good little boy."

"'And make him better to-morrow'—"

"And . . . make . . . him . . . better . . . to-morrow . . ."

"'Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.' That's all. Good night," said the Little Professor in exactly the same tone. "Better . . to . . . morrow . . ." and then there was silence in the room.

"He is sleeping," said the doctor at last. "Go down. I will stay here. It is the crisis."

Not a sound in the quiet house.

A notice hung on the knocker asking visitors not to knock or ring, and the tearful housemaid waited about the hall.

"Master sees no one, sir," she said to the vicar, "and Master Clifford is as ill as can be, and the doctor's here."

In the study the Professor had at last fallen asleep, and he dreamt of his fair young wife, and days that would never come again.

Was his life to grow quite lonely, and was the house to be always quiet?

The door opened gently, and the doctor came in; then he waited patiently.

Suddenly the Professor started up.

"Yes, I am here—I am coming," he said quickly.

The doctor had often had to break bad news; yet a lump was in his throat now.

"The crisis is over," said the doctor unsteadily. "He may live now." And the Big Professor sobbed like a child.

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"He may live," said the little housemaid in the kitchen, and the cook subsided suddenly into a chair and said, "Thank God."

* * * * * *

Into the darkened nursery the Professor stole with noiseless tread.

"Father," said a weak little voice.

"My darling."

"Is it to-morrow?"

"Yes, Little Professor."

"He is better."

"Yes, dear. Father is so glad."

For the first time for many days the Professor turned to his work, and he began to correct his proofs. The printing was careful, a comma here—a capital there—yet he lingered over the pages.

Why had that chapter on Prayer come before him now?

A month ago a belief in prayer seemed an absurdity; nothing could be more conclusive than his arguments against it, but——

The Professor wrote to the printer and said that he must have some time in order that he might carefully revise the work; and the world is still waiting for it.

People say it will be a great loss to the world if it never appears, but the Little Professor thinks differently.

He is down again now in the study, looking whiter and fairer than ever, and the Big Professor, whose artistic skill is on a par with his musical powers, has covered the backs of the proofs with wonderful drawings of cats, and owls, and runcible spoons. These pictures the Little Professor looks at while his Father sings the song, pointing to each object in turn.

The printer is still expecting the revised proofs; perhaps

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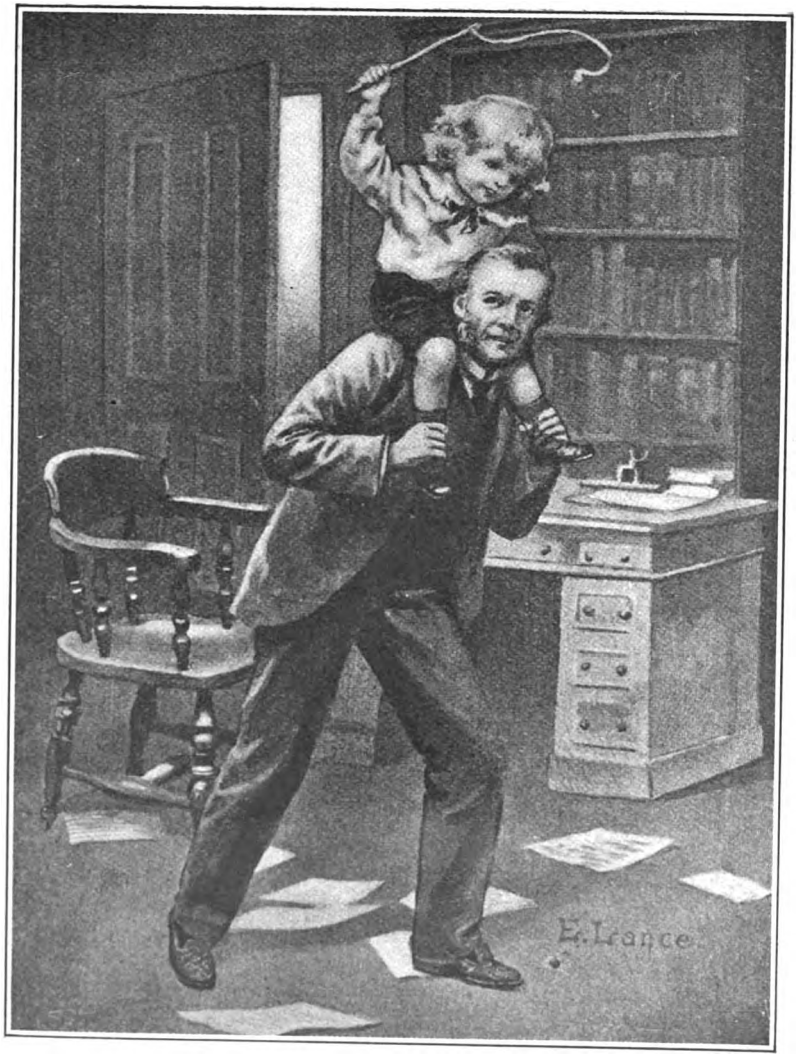

"The Little Professor, . . . brandishing his whip, riding the Big Professor round and round the room."

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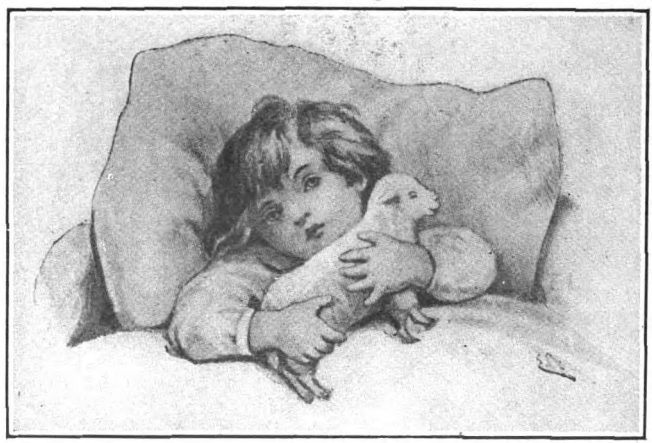
under the Little Professor's influence the revision will be so complete that little of the original will remain.

But the pages are scattered on the study floor, and the Little Professor, shrieking with delight, and brandishing his whip, is riding the Big Professor round and round the room.

"Poor man, he is wasting his powers," said those who looked for the book in vain. "He might have been a great man."

But they little knew; for in the kingdom of the great ones the Professor has at last found an entrance through a door to the land of childlike spirits, held open to him by the tiny hands of the Little Professor..



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